

ADVENT
HOPE

Companions for your Advent Journey of Hope, Peace, Love and Joy

ADVENT IS A TIME OF PREPARATION & ANTICIPATION

While the season has taken on various meanings over time, it is a time that invites us to focus on the coming of Christ. That may include both the birth of Jesus in the little town of Bethlehem many years ago or his promised return at some unknown time. Either way, we are invited into prayer, reflection and deeper relationship with God, who loves us so much as to be born into this world, bearing an unfathomable love for all of creation.

This little resource is offered as a companion in your Advent journey. In it, you will find prayers, blessings, reflections and poems loosely organized around the themes of the candles we will light in our Advent wreaths: Hope, Peace, Love and Joy. We hope that it will complement our worship time together, our Advent reading plans (available online at bethlehem-church.org), and your conversations with loved ones. There is nothing magical or perfect about this resource; if it encourages you to think about other readings or resources, wonderful!

More than anything, we hope that it points to God's faithfulness embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, whom we know as the Christ.

A PRAYER FOR YOUR JOURNEY

Holy One, fill us with wonder, as we marvel at your willingness to become one of us and live among us. Sustain us with hope, peace, love and joy, as you accompany us on our advent journey. Guide us with your light, the light that cannot be overcome. Draw us out of ourselves into this world that you love so much, even as we stay at home, that we might encounter you in surprising, new ways. Amen.



HOPE

“Celebrating Advent means being able to wait. Waiting is an art that our impatient age has forgotten. It wants to break open the the fruit when it has hardly finished planting the shoot. But all too often the greedy eyes are only deceived; the fruit that seemed so precious is still green on the inside, and disrespectful hands ungratefully toss aside what has so disappointed them. Whoever does not know the austere blessedness of waiting — that is, of hopefully doing without — will never experience the full blessing of fulfillment.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer



“HOPE” IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS

by Emily Dickinson

*“Hope” is the thing with feathers —
That perches in the soul —
And sings the tune without the words —
And never stops — at all —*

*And sweetest — in the Gale — is heard —
And sore must be the storm —
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm —*

*I’ve heard it in the chilliest land —
And on the strangest Sea —
Yet — never — in Extremity,
It asked a crumb — of me.*

THE MERTON PRAYER

by Thomas Merton

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

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PEACE

“May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be content knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us.”

—St. Teresa of Ávila

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THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS

by Wendell Berry

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

A PRAYER

from Julian of Norwich

*In you, Father all-mighty, we have our preservation and our bliss.
In you, Christ, we have our restoring and our saving. You are our
mother, brother and savior. In you, our Lord the Holy Spirit, is
marvellous and plenteous grace. You are our clothing; for love you
wrap us and embrace us. You are our maker, our lover, our keeper.
Teach us to believe that by your grace all shall be well, and all shall
be well, and all manner of things shall be well. Amen.*

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LOVE

“If God is the source of love, as I believe God is, then the only way you can worship God is by loving. Not by being right, but by loving. By loving wastefully. The image in my mind is an old sink in the basement, that you plug up the drains and you turn on all the [taps] and the water overflows the boundaries and goes all over the floor and fills up every crack and cranny... and never stops to ask whether that crack deserves this living water... You love because love is what you have to do, not because somebody deserves the love. You love wastefully.”

—Bishop John Shelby Spong

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LOVE (III)

by George Herbert

*Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lacked any thing.*

*“A guest,” I answered, “worthy to be here”:
Love said, “You shall be he.”
“I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on thee.”
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
“Who made the eyes but I?”*

*“Truth, Lord; but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.”
“And know you not,” says Love, “who bore the blame?”
“My dear, then I will serve.”
“You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste my meat.”
So I did sit and eat.*

A PRAYER FOR ADVENT

from Howard Thurman

*May the sounds of Advent stir a longing in your people, O God.
Come again to set us free from the dullness of routine and the poverty
of our imaginations. Break the patterns which bind us to small
commitments and to the stale answers we have given to questions of
no importance. Let the Advent trumpet blow, let the walls of our
defenses crumble, and make a place in our lives for the freshness of
your love, well-lived in the Spirit, and still given to all who know
their need and dare receive it. Amen.*



JOY

“Joy is both a decision and a surrender. Eventually we stop being preoccupied with creating a fault-free environment that will ensure our own happiness, and we discover that joy is much more like falling into an objective Presence, a Larger Body, Love itself, a unified field, that many would call God. You do not manufacture joy, you collapse into it when you give up trying to make it happen.”

—Fr. Richard Rohr



DON'T HESITATE

by Mary Oliver

If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty of lives and whole towns destroyed or about to be. We are not wise, and not very often kind. And much can never be redeemed. Still, life has some possibility left. Perhaps this is its way of fighting back, that sometimes something happens better than all the riches or power in the world. It could be anything, but very likely you notice it in the instant when love begins. Anyway, that's often the case. Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.

AN ADVENT PRAYER

from Martin Luther

Dear God, protect us and keep us in your grace that we may be that little flock, which gladly receives Christ, singing, "Hosanna! God be praised," that we receive him as our King, and that we may be Christians. We know why we are called Christians, namely, after our King Christ, since we are baptized in his name and washed in his blood. Help us remain in him. Amen.

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FOR CHRISTMAS AND BEYOND

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GODBURST

by Ann Weems

*When the Holy Child is born into our hearts
there is a rain of stars
a rushing of angels
a blaze of candles
this God burst into our lives.
Love is running through the streets.*

WATCH, O LORD

by St. Augustine

*Watch, O Lord, with those who wake, or watch, or weep tonight,
and give your angels and saints charge over those who sleep. Tend
your sick ones, O Lord Jesus Christ, rest your weary ones, bless your
dying ones, soothe your suffering ones, pity your afflicted ones, shield
your joyous ones, and all for your love's sake. Amen.*

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